

Sample Press Op-Ed on SCHIP

Helping Women Get Prenatal Care

When it comes to health insurance, what happens to a family that makes too much money to qualify for Medical Assistance, but doesn't make enough to afford health insurance? In _____, _____* families are enrolled in the State Children's Health Insurance Program. This is a cooperative program established by Congress in 1997 to provide health insurance to kids who would otherwise fall between the cracks. The federal and Pennsylvania governments pay for it jointly. Every state in the Union has a similar program.

Good healthcare during childhood is extremely important. If a child is healthy he (or she) is much more likely to be healthy, happy, and productive throughout his life. So SCHIP is an investment in today's children that will pay dividends over the long term in the form of more productive citizens and lower health costs.

Until now, however, the program hasn't been doing as much as it could. If quality healthcare is important during childhood, it is even more important during the critical nine months of pregnancy. If something goes wrong during the nine months before a child is born, the consequences on the child's life and health can be severe. Yet SCHIP, presently, does not cover prenatal care.

As a compassionate conservative, President Bush wants to change this. His Secretary of Health and Human Services has proposed a new federal rule redefining "child" as including unborn children for purposes of the SCHIP program. By doing so, tens of thousands of children may now be offered the chance to live healthier, more productive lives.

It would be hard to overstate the importance of good prenatal care. The March of Dimes advises women on its Web site: "Pregnancy is a very special time. What you eat and what you do – or don't do – will make a lasting difference in your baby's life. A baby's organs begin to form in the first eight weeks of pregnancy. ... As soon as you think you're pregnant, see your health care provider. It is important to see your health care provider regularly throughout your pregnancy, so be sure to keep all your prenatal care appointments."

The Bush Administration wants to provide poor and working-poor mothers with prenatal care assistance. Prenatal care is important, but it is presently out of reach for too many American women.

Unfortunately, as with so many things in Washington, politics may stand in the way. By suggesting that unborn children should be eligible for assistance under SCHIP, HHS has piqued the ire of abortion lobbyists. They cannot stand to hear a fetus called a child, even if it means expanding healthcare coverage for low-income women.

This is more than a great shame. If the abortion lobby succeeds in blocking the Bush Administration's prenatal care initiative, the result will be more illnesses and more birth defects that might otherwise have been prevented.

Washington is full of special interest groups with narrow agendas. We are now discovering that some are willing to place their political agendas even over the health and lives of children.

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*For state information on SCHIP go to: www.insurekidsnow.gov/states.htm

Posted: March 6, 2002

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